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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 003003

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SUBJECT: U.S., EUROPEANS SEEK POLITICAL SOLUTION TO DRC'S
NKUNDA PROBLEM

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Laurence Wohlers, reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Members of the Great Lakes Contact Group brainstormed Sept. 21 in Brussels about political solutions to the growing unrest among rebel forces in Eastern Congo while acknowledging that the Government of the DRC appears to be leaning toward a military solution. European Commission officials expressed concern about a recent \$5 billion loan from China to the DRC, and noted that opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba recently told Commissioner Michel he is ready to return from Portugal to the DRC if the international community can help ensure his personal safety. End summary.

Seeking political solutions for Nkunda

12. (C) Members of the Great Lakes Contact Group, meeting as a group Sept. 21, and separately with Ambassador Joyce Leader Sept. 20, said the time is right for the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the international community to push hard for a political solution, backed by the military muscle of MONUC, to the lingering problem of rebel forces led by Gen. Laurent Nkunda. Two European Commission officials, as well as the commander of MONUC, Gen. Babacar Gaye, said President Kabila continually waffles on whether to use military force or political persuasion against Nkunda, who operates independently from his base in Goma. Gen. Gaye said that Kabila has changed his mind numerous times. He recalled a meeting during which Kabila told SRSG Swing that he would use force against Nkunda, but when Swing expressed doubts about whether he had the means to do so, Kabila quickly changed his mind and said he would not use force. Joaquim Salgueiro, Deputy Head of Unit for Central Africa at the European Commission's Directorate General for Development, said European Commissioner Louis Michel believes that military solutions are a dead end, but that political solutions must involve more than "talking around a table," they must include security guarantees. FARDC (the Congolese Army) is incapable of providing the necessary security, so MONUC must take on that responsibility, Salgueiro said. Gaye said that violence remains a daily way of life in eastern Congo. He said that Nkunda appears to have started the Aug. 27-29 fighting around Goma, but he quickly backed down when FARDC, aided by MONUC, responded forcefully. "My personal opinion is that he felt the wind turning," Gaye said.

13. (C) Christian Manahl, Deputy Director of Political Affairs for MONUC, said Nkunda has shown flexibility recently, and the time is right to deal with him through four avenues: military, political, diplomatic, and the media. Specifically, on the military and political fronts, Manahl

said it is important that Nkunda understand the options his forces have for joining FARDC. On the diplomatic front, he said that high-level meetings scheduled this month in New York between Presidents Kabila and Kagame could send an important signal about Congolese-Rwandan cooperation. Getting the word out through the media about options available to Nkunda's forces and the Government's plans to ensure security in the region are also important parts of the equation, Manahl said.

¶4. (C) Roeland Van de Geer, the EU's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, said the international community must make sure it addresses the underlying concerns of Nkunda's supporters and not just focus on getting Nkunda to accept exile. Otherwise, he said, whoever replaces Nkunda could be worse. Salgueiro said that the DRC's diplomatic initiatives with neighboring states over Eastern Congo are important, but shouldn't overshadow the need to address what is happening in Congo itself, namely protection of Tutsi minority populations, dealing with the FDLR, and breaking up "mafia networks" profiting from unregulated natural resource exports.

¶5. (C) Members of the Contact Group noted that the time may be right for the Community of Sant'Egidio to play a role in negotiating peace agreements in Eastern Congo. Koen Vervaeke, head of the Council Secretariat's Africa Task Force, also suggested reinvigorating a 2005 package of measures for the FDLR's return to Rwanda that was compiled by former EU Great Lakes Special Envoy Aldo Ajello. The package specifically lays out actions that the Rwandan and Congolese governments and the international community can take to encourage FDLR returns. But despite all the brainstorming

BRUSSELS 00003003 002 OF 002

about potential political solutions, European Commission officials and Contact Group members noted that all signs point to Kabila taking an increasingly militant stance toward Nkunda. During a visit to Goma Sept. 19, Kabila told reporters that Nkunda's forces must join FARDC soon, according to press reports.

Bemba's role as viable political opposition

¶6. (C) Salgueiro, reporting on talks that Commissioner Michel held recently in Lisbon with opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba, said there is a need for a viable political opposition in DRC and that Bemba should be encouraged to participate in the existing political system, not operate outside of it. Salgueiro said Bemba told Michel he is ready to return to DRC from Portugal, where he has been living since April, but that he fears for his personal safety. Bemba requested 20-25 specially trained police officers to serve as a personal protection detail, Salgueiro said. Ambassador Leader replied that a political opposition is important, but the U.S. does not necessarily believe that Bemba needs to be its leader.

Troublesome partnerships with China

¶7. (C) Salgueiro and Elisabeth Tison, Head of Unit for Central Africa at the European Commission, said they were concerned about news that China had loaned \$5 billion to the DRC. Specifically, they worried that China was receiving valuable mining concessions in return for the loans. Salgueiro said there are rumors in diplomatic circles that the DRC is buying arms from China as well. He noted that the Commission plans to give approximately 150 million euro per year to the DRC over the next five years.

¶8. (U) Ambassador Leader cleared this report.
MURRAY

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